

## The Shepherd Of Israel Micah 5:1-5

God's Word comes to us today through the Old Testament prophet Micah.

I would like to read his prophecy one more time. [read *Micah 5:1-5*]

A storm was gathering over Israel.

It wasn't a storm of wind and water; it was a storm of God's growing wrath toward His people.

The storm had been gathering for a long time—for hundreds of years as a matter of fact.

Micah was the latest in a long line of prophets who had pointed out the storm clouds and warned that one day they would open up and rain down destruction upon the land.

The lightning of God's wrath would flash in the swords of Israel's enemies, the walls of her cities would be torn down and the people slaughtered, and those who survived would be carried off into exile as prisoners of war.

Moses was the first prophet to warn the Israelites what the consequences would be if they turned away from God.

He said it plainly: *"...if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed."* (Deut. 30:17-18)

A generation later, Joshua repeated the warning: *"If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you."* (Joshua 24:20)

But the Israelites refused to heed these warnings and spent the next four hundred years "doing what seemed right in their own eyes" and ignoring the God who had delivered them out of slavery and given them a land of their own.

Most of the kings who followed the period of the Judges were no better.

Solomon, who was regarded as the wisest of men, married pagan wives and allowed them to introduce pagan religion into Israel.

He let them build shrines on the hilltops and sacrifice their children to pagan gods.

And from Solomon's time on, it had all been downhill.

Ruler after ruler—Jereboam, Jehoram, Ahab, Zechariah, Menahem—all abandoned Yahweh and worshipped pagan gods.

The people whom God had chosen to be His treasured possession—a nation of priests and a light to the nations—became a nation of idol-worshippers.

Prophet after prophet warned them of what their apostasy would bring down upon them but they didn't believe the prophets; they called them doomsayers and pointed to Israel's economic prosperity and military might as evidence of God's favor.

Sound familiar?

Like us, they were confident that God would NEVER allow their enemies to triumph over His chosen people.

And the storm clouds grew darker and darker.

This was the situation when God called Micah to announce to the Israelites that the long-promised destruction was at hand.

*"Marshal your troops, O city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod."*

For Israel's ruler to be struck on the cheek with a rod meant that he would be humiliated and deposed.

And that meant that the people he ruled would be trampled under the boots of their enemies.

And that is exactly what happened.

Within one generation, the city of Samaria fell to the Assyrians and ten of the twelve tribes of Israel were assimilated into the culture of their enemies—never to emerge again as an independent nation.

150 years after that, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Judea, breached the walls of Jerusalem, sacked the city and demolished the temple of Solomon.

He hauled the citizens off to Babylon as prisoners of war where they languished for seven decades.

The temple lay in ruins, the sacrifices ceased, and the remaining two tribes of Judah and Benjamin were reduced to a rabble.

Such is the fate of nations who turn away from God.

But in the midst of this darkness, Micah said, God would light a candle of hope.

Out of all the smoke and rubble and destruction which was going to come upon Israel a new ruler, would emerge.

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”*

A new king was coming!

He would come from before time itself began and he would rule over Israel for all eternity.

The question is: which “Israel” would he rule over?

Would it be the twelve original tribes of Israel: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulon, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph and Benjamin?

Those tribes no longer exist.

Ten tribes were swallowed up by the Assyrians when Samaria fell.

Later, the few records that survived the Babylonian exile were lost when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 69 A.D. and the Jews were dispersed throughout the world.

The original twelve tribes of Israel have not existed for almost two thousand years.

Could it be modern Israel—the nation that exists today?

The Israel in which one-third of the population is Moslem and a mosque stands where Solomon’s temple once stood, proclaiming the glory of Islam?

The Israel where the majority of Jews are either agnostics or atheists?

The Israel whose survival depends upon infusions of military and financial aid from America?

Is that the Israel which the new King would rule over?

Or is Israel simply the sum of all the Jews in the world—all who are born of Jewish mothers?

If so, which Jews? Reform Jews, who believe that “messiah” is just another name for human potential?

Conservative Jews, who observe the forms of Jewish worship but deny the content?

Or Orthodox Jews, who believe the ancient prophecies but deny that Messiah has come and therefore have no sacrifice for sins, no atonement?

If Israel is one of these groups, then the Daughter of Zion is still engaged in civil war because none of these groups agrees with the other two about what it means to be a Jew.

Can any of these be the Israel to which Micah is referring?

No, Israel is none of these.

Ancient Israel went the way of all flesh, just as her prophets predicted she would.

Micah is talking about a new Israel when he says, *“But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel. Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth....”*

The ruler of the new Israel would emerge from the tribe of Judah, from the town of Bethlehem.

As Isaiah had prophesied, this ruler would be born of a virgin and would be **Immanuel: God himself** come down to be with His people

Micah saw it all, eight hundred years before it happened.

*God could not save a people who had turned away from him and placed their trust in pagan gods.*

*He had given his people the right of refusal—and they chose to exercise it.*

And they suffered the consequences.

So God raised up a new Israel, a people who would trust Him and believe His promises; sons and daughters of Abraham who shared the faith of Abraham.

True Israelites who would repent of their sins and return to God for forgiveness.

An Israel of faith; an Israel of hope.

This new Israel would not be defined by circumcision or ceremonial law or tribal lineage or national boundaries, but only by faith—faith in God’s new covenant which knits God’s people together into one body, one flock led by One Good Shepherd

Micah says: *“He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.”*

And so it came to pass.

In the fullness of time the divine Shepherd of Israel came just as Micah had said he would.

He was born in Bethlehem of the tribe of Judah, born of a virgin’

He would be Immanuel: God with us.

He would be a shepherd Who said: *“I know my sheep and my sheep know me... All who came before me were thieves and robbers...[but]...I am the good shepherd.”*

And so Micah ends his prophecy: *“And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace”*

These new Israelites would follow their new and greater Moses out of sin’s bondage into the glorious freedom of the children of God, and that freedom would be proclaimed to the ends of the earth.

In a few more days we will be celebrating the birth of the King of the new Israel.

And let our remembrance of that blessed event bring us great joy!

But let it also remind us to never, never place our confidence in other gods—like ancient Israel did.

Gods like material prosperity or military power or charismatic leaders—or even government itself.

We have one basis for hope and one alone, and that is the Shepherd of Israel.

May we follow Him all of our days.

In Christ Jesus, Amen